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SIPDIS

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CENTCOM FOR POLAD
NEA/PPD FOR AFERNANDEZ
THE WHITE HOUSE PASS TO NSC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION -- AL-HOUTHI CLASHES, DRAFT PRESS
LAW, JMP REFORM INITIATIVE, ETC.

Following paragraphs cover November 30-December 6

1. HOSTILITIES RESUME IN SA'ADA: On November 30, all major opposition and independent outlets gave prominent coverage to the resumption of clashes between ROYG security forces and followers of the Al-Houthi rebel movement in the northern Sa'ada governorate. Casualty estimates on the first day of fighting ranged widely: Al-Shura.net (Zaidi-affiliated Popular Forces Union outlet) reported two rebels killed and four policemen injured; Al-Wahdawi.net (Nasserite Party site) reported three policemen killed; Al-Wasat (liberal privately-owned weekly; circulation: 5,000) reported eight policemen killed; and Akhbar Al-Yawm (independent daily, often sensationalist; circulation: 3,000) reported five rebels killed. [Note: Foreign media sources, in particular Agence France Presse, reported a higher casualty figure, printing on November 30 that the total casualties on the rebel side had reached sixteen. End note.] Al-Wasat added that the clashes were primarily in the Bait Zoqo area of Sa'ada.

2. On November 30, Al-Shura.net reported a threat by Yahya Badruddin Al-Houthi, son of rebel cleric Badruddin Al-Houthi, of attacks on foreign interests in Yemen to be "waged by ROYG forces but blamed on the Al-Houthi." [Note: Yahya Al-Houthi is a Member of Parliament and nominally a member of the GPC. He is currently in Sweden. End note.] Al-Shura also reported Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, another son of Badruddin Al-Houthi, sent a message to President Saleh complaining about the failure of ROYG security forces to observe President Saleh's amnesty, issued during Ramadan, for Al-Houthi followers.

3. On December 3, Al-Sahwa (Islah party weekly; circulation: 25,000) reported security forces had surrounded the Al-Houthi rebels in the Sahar area of Sa'ada, and tallied the death toll at 18 as follows: ten policeman, six rebels, and three civilians. On December 4, the quasi-independent English language Yemen Observer weekly newspaper (circulation: 5,000) placed the scene of many of the clashes at Al-Khafji in Sa'ada. Also on December 4, Al-Tagheer.net (private news site) reported Al-Houthi followers were regrouping on the Ham Mountain in Al-Jawf governorate.

4. HUNT OIL: Al-Sahwa reported on December 4 that production operations at Block 18 have come to a halt following the transfer of control from Hunt Oil to the Safir Exploration & Production Company.

5. PRESS LAW: Many outlets including the official Ministry of Defense weekly 26 September newspaper (circulation: 40,000), Al-Sahwa, and the English-language Yemen Observer noted the beginning of the Shura (consultative) Council debate on the draft press law. On November 30, NewsYemen.net (independent website) reported criticism of the draft law by members of the Yemen Journalists' Syndicate. The syndicate members complained that amendments to the law have been "made in secret" and "without YJS input." Al-Sahwa and Al-Tagheer.net reported on December 4 meetings with visiting MEPI representative Jacquelyn Johnstone and PAO with YJS members and with other journalists at the Political Development Forum on the subject of press freedom.

6. WOMEN'S CONFERENCE -- QUOTA ANNOUNCED: On December 4, Al-Sahwa reported PM Bajammal, speaking at the opening session of a Sana'a conference on Arab women's rights, publicly proposed a 15 percent quota for female political representation. Al-Sahwa also noted DAS Gordon Gray's speech, in which he stated the USG is to train female judges from the region and has earmarked \$27 million to improve conditions for women in Iraq.

7. JMP REFORM INITIATIVE: On November 30, NewsYemen.net and the daily government Al-Thawra (circulation: 40,000) reported President Saleh "welcomed the recent Joint Meeting Party reform initiative." That report stands out in contrast to the heated objections from his ruling GPC party and, in both the official and independent press, came in the

midst heated criticism of the GPC's reaction by opposition outlets. On December 1, columnist Zaid Al-Shami wrote in Al-Sahwa of the "hypocrisy of the GPC" in pressing the JMP to generate a reform proposal only "to reject it" once released. On the same day, opinion pieces in Al-Thawri (Yemen Socialist Party weekly; circulation: 10,000), Al-Wasat, Al-Ushbu', and May 22 all criticized the GPC's response to the JMP proposal.

18. Also on December 1, Iran's Arabic new channel, Al-Alam, broadcast a program entitled "What Is The Truth?" focused on the JMP reform initiative. The program featured YSP member Ali Al-Sarari, journalist Abdulrazag Farfur, Islah Party leader Mohammad Qahtan, and writer Abdulkareem Al-Wishali. Al-Sarari and Qahtan strongly supported the reform initiative, pointing to deterioration in press freedoms, difficult economic conditions, and rampant corruption as indicators of the need for reform. Farfur, for his part, exhorted the Yemeni opposition to take stock of the positive reforms taken by the ROYG since 1995, and argued that journalists often abuse press freedom to libel President Saleh.

19. GENERAL WHITCOMB VISIT: Al-Thawra reported on November 30 General Charles Whitcomb of Central Command held a meeting with Interior Minister Al-Alimi on security cooperation. Also on November 30, 26 September reported General Whitcomb met with Defense Minister Eleiwa on counterterrorism.

KRAJESKI